

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

August 8, 1978

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Victorio Mamel Schillizzi Acuna, Former History Professor at the National University of the South
F. Allen Harris, Political Officer, American Embassy, Buenos Aires

PLACE : American Embassy

SUBJECT : Anti-Subversive Campaign in Bahia Blanca

Argentina
New Human Rights Problem →

Mr. Schillizzi called at the Embassy to complain that since his release in December from 17 months of PEN detention he was unable to obtain employment as a teacher in Argentina. Mr. Schillizzi said that although he had been released from PEN without any conditions as he was considered to be "recuperable," he was effectively blackballed from exercising his profession after 22 years of teaching. He noted that many PEN detainees were under orders of "prescindibilidad" (proscription) which legally prevented them from holding any state employment for five years. He emphasized that such an order had not been issued against him, but he was still barred from public employment de facto.

In response to questions regarding the government's anti-subversive campaign in Bahia Blanca, Schillizzi presented the following information:

Bahia Blanca is sociologically an unusual city in Argentina. It has a major concentration of both Army and Naval units. Both the Fifth Army Corps Headquarters and one of the Navy's major bases are located there. The town itself is not industrialized, but is a service, sales and shipping center, for the rich surrounding farm area. Although the town has grown substantially over the years, with immigration from the Province of Buenos Aires and La Pampa (the latter a depressed economic region), it is well integrated socially. Unlike other major urban centers in Argentina it does not have a large class of industrial factory workers. The average person in Bahia Blanca is middle class, conservative and bourgeois. There has never been a strong leftist influence among the population in Bahia Blanca. The town has maintained more conservative and traditional political outlooks.

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The University of the South was founded in the 1950's by Peron, but actually came into being under the Aramburu administration. The leadership of the University del Sur at the time of the revolution was leftist and some individuals may have been sympathetic to the Montoneros. However, the faculty was for the most part non-Marxist, composed of persons whose politics could best be described as either liberal reformists or "iluminados" (Christian Democrats).

Despite the fact that the repression in Bahia Blanca was tough, it has not involved large numbers of people. "It is said" that approximately a hundred persons have "disappeared" and about 3,000 persons were picked up and questioned and then released. Anti-subversive activities in Bahia Blanca had a bizarre image as the Navy operatives wore hoods during their raids and the local paper, LA NUEVA PROVINCIA, strongly and openly supported the operations.

Among the faculty members of the University of the South, 17 or 18 professors were arrested and placed under the PEN; none disappeared. Forty seven professors fled Argentina to avoid arrest. Of the PEN prisoners only four or five have been released; two are in jail in Bahia Blanca and the others are held in La Plata Penitentiary.

Public reaction to an early raid in La Plata may have affected the operational character of the anti-subversive effort there. During a military raid to arrest the son of a well known Bahia Blanca family, his elderly parents were beaten and everything of value looted from his parents' residence. This led to an enormous expression of outrage among the conservative citizenry of the town, which in turn led to tight controls being placed over both Army and Navy operations conducted in the city.

At the present time the situation in Bahia Blanca would best be described as "very controlled." The present Fifth Corps Commander Vaquero is regarded as a moderate ("blando"). Police Commissioner Alais is the hardliner today in Bahia Blanca. He is reportedly an in-law of Suarez Mason and is thought to be the person primarily responsible for the anti-subversive activities conducted in the city.

EMBASSY COMMENT: The Embassy had earlier received very little information regarding the anti-subversive program in Bahia Blanca. On August 3, 1978 29 residents of Bahia Blanca

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placed a paid advertisement in LA PRENSA announcing a mass for the reappearance of their disappeared children. The information in this report is corroborated by a report from another Embassy contact who was a student in Bahia Blanca in 1976. END COMMENT.

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